

Karen DuBois-Walton
Testimony Supporting H.B. 6593:
AN ACT CONCERNING HOUSING AUTHORITY
JURISDICTION
February 7, 2023

Honorable Co-Chairs Representative Luxenberg and Senator Moore, Vice Chairs Representative Khan and Senator Lesser, and Ranking Members Representative Scott and Senator Sampson; and the entirety of the Housing Committee:

My name is Karen DuBois-Walton and I respectfully submit this testimony in support of **H.B. 6593, AN ACT CONCERNING HOUSING AUTHORITY JURISDICTION.**

I serve as the President of Elm City Communities/Housing Authority of the City of New Haven and our affiliates The Glendower Group, Inc., a development company and 360 Management Group, Co., a property management company. At ECC/HANH we have spent the past 20 years rebuilding older public housing communities into high quality, mixed income communities of choice that offer affordable and market rate, rental and ownership options for families within the City of New Haven. These investments in high quality communities are investments in people – investments in families. They are also investments in our city – generating positive economic growth, spurring additional investment from our neighbors, and creating sustainable, environmentally friendly new infrastructure.

Due to the limitations placed upon public housing authorities, we can only work within the town/city boundaries where we were established. Housing authorities have become prolific and qualified developers of affordable housing. We have had to be creative in our approaches and as a result we are the primary developers of mixed income housing and yet we are restricted by these archaic jurisdictional lines from operating within the private market as any other developer.

My support for H.B. 6593 stems from my concern about the lack of affordable housing in our state. Connecticut is experiencing a serious housing shortage, with record low vacancy rates and sales inventories. Our housing shortage constrains our statewide economic growth, increases our taxes, and shuts too many of our residents out of opportunity. Housing is a primary issue this session and allowing PHAs to develop as any other developer can is a reasonable and sensible step towards resolving our crisis. We have a viable solution in front of us: we can accelerate the development of quality affordable housing by removing the state-imposed, arbitrary limitations on Housing authorities who are expertly skilled and equipped to serve as developers of affordable housing.

Current statutory limitations mean that while other developers may look for a property and develop a plan to create housing anywhere in the state and then pursue the local necessary approvals, housing authorities are told that their ability to create high quality affordable housing is not allowed when looking at these same deals. While other developers may struggle to figure out how to make the development project affordable, housing authorities who have the federal subsidy needed to do so are told “not in my backyard” while families in need go unhoused or continue to pay far more than they can afford often for substandard housing. Through needless regulation, Connecticut is making every resident worse off, exacerbating our housing shortage and preventing economic diversity in the little housing that is built.

Simply, this bill:

- Authorizes housing authorities to develop affordable housing beyond its current borders by allowing the placing of project based vouchers (Federal subsidy) and/or allowing the PHA to serve as a developer.
- Subjects the PHA developer to all local zoning and site plan requirements. This bill seeks to level the playing field with other developers and does not seek to further advantage housing authority developers. We seek to develop according to fair and equitable local land use processes.
- Creates opportunities for residents to remain in their town, raise their children, retain their young people and allow opportunity for their seniors to age in place.
- By enabling quality housing development, this bill spurs economic development and activity in our state and resolves Connecticut's worst constraints.

Importantly, this bill does not:

- Create any new requirements for towns to develop additional affordable housing.
- Carry a negative fiscal impact

CT is facing a housing crisis leaving far too many families struggling to make ends meet. Estimates suggest that nearly 40% of CT families are housing-cost burdened, including nearly one-third of homeowners. Only 1:4 eligible families are currently receiving housing subsidy support. Even the families already receiving subsidy struggle to find places to live—Connecticut's housing shortage makes it incredibly difficult for voucher holders to find an eligible unit in any town or city. This shortage is impacting every community—urban, suburban and rural, making it harder for families to raise their children, harder for seniors to remain in their town, harder for towns to fund their services.

HB 6593 will not solve our housing crisis—but it is a valuable step in the right direction to begin creating quality housing that's affordable to all our residents all over the state. Housing authorities have become major developers of quality, mixed-income housing. Broadening their jurisdiction will bolster their ability to ensure people in every city and town have the opportunity to live securely and succeed—without new state funding. Parents, children, families, seniors, young people and our most underserved communities-at-large across the state are depending on our state leaders to give them a fair chance.

We cannot afford to continue down the path we're already on. Homes in Connecticut are too expensive, and we need to take action to create some affordable options. **I ask that you support H.B. 6593.** Thank you.